

Children exercised less during lockdown: How to get them moving again

January 18 2022, by Alison Owen



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Lockdowns during the pandemic aimed to limit the spread of COVID-19 and related deaths. However, these lockdowns also affected how active people were. [Children became](#) significantly more sedentary.

There is a risk that short term changes in children's physical [activity](#) in

reaction to COVID-19 may end up extending beyond [the duration of the pandemic](#). It is very easy for habits to become established, and for a more sedentary and less physically [active lifestyle](#) to become normal and ingrained in young [people](#).

However, there are ways children can be encouraged to be more active. These include getting the whole family involved in physical activity and building exercise into a routine.

A global trend

Research from around the world has examined the extent that COVID-19 restrictions have had on children and their levels of physical activity.

Canadian [researchers](#) carried out an online survey of the [parents](#) of 1472 young people during COVID-19 restrictions. They found that only 4.8% of children aged five to 11 were meeting the [Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines](#), which include an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. For young people aged 12 to 17, the number meeting the guidelines was just 0.6%.

Another study surveyed 211 parents of [US children](#) aged five to 13. It found that children spent about 90 minutes a day sitting down for school-related activities, and a further eight hours daily sitting down for leisure purposes during the [pandemic](#).

A study in [Shanghai, China](#) compared the activity levels of 2,426 young people aged from six to 17 before and during the pandemic. It found that, overall, the amount of time the [young people](#) spent being physically active decreased drastically—from around nine hours a week to less than two hours a week. Screen time was up by approximately 30 hours a week on average.

The story was similar in Italy. [Researchers compared](#) the behavior of a group of 41 children with obesity both before the pandemic and three weeks into Italy's national lockdown. The time the children spent taking part in [sports activities](#) decreased during the pandemic, while sleep and screen time increased.

Getting moving

Given the numerous physical and psychological benefits of increased physical activity, children should be given plenty of opportunity and encouragement to be physically active.

Family involvement [plays an important role](#) in children's activity levels. Encouragement from parents, and parents taking part in physical activities with their children, is [associated](#) with higher indoor and outdoor child physical activity and play.

Research has also shown that [having a pet dog](#) can encourage children [to be active](#).

One way to respond to the uncertainty of COVID is by developing [routine](#) and structure for children. Promoting a sense of predictability at home can go a long way in helping children cope with an uncertain world. Regular family walks at the weekend or after-school or [exercise classes](#) can be a really positive way of helping children to feel secure and nurtured.

One way that children enjoy staying active is by attending classes, from dance to swimming to football. During lockdown, these classes had to stop, but many have now reopened. They are a great way for children to socialize as well as keeping fit.

For some people, however, these classes are no longer an option. Some

activities may be permanently closed, or families may have less disposable income than before the pandemic. Parents [may be anxious](#) about their children attending classes with other children.

Parental anxiety can have an impact on children's [physical activity](#). Children of parents who were [more anxious](#) in Canada visited the park less than children of less anxious parents during the pandemic.

During lockdowns, the cancelation of sports and activity classes have inspired programs offering online fitness classes for children. This is a great way of enabling children to be physically active at home in situations where their parents might not feel comfortable with them attending the large classes that they did before the pandemic.

It is really important for [children](#) to be physically active, and to stop a more sedentary lifestyle continuing into adulthood.

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